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"Breaking Barriers in Teaching and Learning" - Constructing an Honors Composition Course to Support a Research-Based Honors Curriculum

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CHAPTER NINE

Constructing an Honors Composition Course to Support a Research-Based Honors Curriculum

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As the research focus of postsecondary honors education intensifies, the honors composition course can be designed to support this mission by introducing students to discipline-specific research tools and argumentation styles while building an interdisciplinary community of scholars who can debate issues both within and outside their fields. Not only do students develop skills in selecting, reading, and writing researched academic arguments, but they also gain insight into the publication and presentation processes as related to professional development in a given discipline. Students learn how publishers and editors serve as gatekeepers of what is considered knowledge in a field, how researchers debate issues with each other in print, how publication timelines for various types of

books and journals differ, and why publication in scholarly and professional venues is important to one's career.

The course design presented in this chapter consists of several core components that help to prepare students for coursework in their majors and to retain students in the honors program by equipping them with skills needed for completion of later thesis and capstone projects. The introductory discussion provides a rationale for assigned papers and readings, followed by a sample syllabus (Appendix 1) and detailed assignment sheets (Appendix 2) used by the author.

- I. **Core assignment sequence:** Students choose topics from their prospective majors and develop them through five major assignments. Focusing on a topic encourages students to identify and investigate current issues in their prospective majors and to gain familiarity with not only the venues in which their disciplinary research is published but also the elements of writing, such as organization, style, technical vocabulary, and format, used by published researchers in that field. Some students use this sequence as a springboard for future research projects, while others use it to explore potential majors or to change majors altogether.
 1. *Website Analysis:* Students evaluate a website they might use as a source for their final research papers. Criteria for thoughtful evaluation of websites can be readily found on university library webpages or in composition textbooks, and in applying these criteria, students learn to discern appropriate, scholarly sites from popular or fake news sites and from "Joe Blow's Nuclear Physics" site.
 2. *Book Analysis:* Close examination of a book-length argument allows for discussion of the time, effort, and resources involved in bringing a book to publication. Monographs by single or multiple authors provide the most useful insight into the ways in which lengthy arguments are crafted; anthologies are certainly appropriate sources for research papers, but they often comprise shorter chapters

that are closer to journal article length and may actually be reprints of previously published articles. Students can consult with their professors and major advisors in selecting key texts for analysis.

3. *Journal Analysis*: Most students are accustomed to locating individual journal articles through library searches, but fewer are familiar with the actual journals themselves. For this assignment, students analyze an entire issue of a scholarly or professional journal, including both content (article topics, writing styles, methodologies) and format (journal sections, editorials, advertisements, job postings). Students learn that journals serve disciplines in a variety of ways, not simply showcasing current research but also acting as a voice for a specific professional organization, promoting the organization's other publications and services, and providing networking opportunities for readers and members.
4. *Annotated Bibliography*: Students compile an annotated bibliography of a *minimum* of twenty items that are potential source material for their research papers. The student collects a pool of pertinent, appropriately cited resources from which to draw to write the research paper while phrasing the annotation as a summary to identify unique information that each source might contribute to the final paper.
5. *Research Paper*: Rather than simply writing "A History of . . ." something, students write final papers that identify and weigh arguments concerning debatable, discipline-related issues relevant to their majors. Many students are eager to begin exploring issues in their prospective majors or to continue research that they began in high school—as long as they are not recycling previously written papers verbatim. Some undecided students may use the assignment sequence to investigate potential majors, and other students may actually change majors during the

course of the research project. For honors students who bemoan having to take a first-year composition course at all, the disciplinary research focus can keep them engaged in the course, and all students can use the opportunity to become acquainted with library holdings, online professional resources, and faculty mentors who can advise them on topic and source selection.

- II. **Supplemental readings:** Articles from the two NCHC journals, *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council* and *Honors In Practice*, and from other sources on gifted education are used not only to demonstrate argumentative strategies (definition, narrative, rebuttal) but also to increase students' awareness of important issues in honors education, thereby building a stronger honors community and in turn improving commitment to and retention in the honors program and various honors activities, such as participation in regional and national honors conferences. Sample supplemental readings include the following:

Textbook Chapter Supplemental Reading

Reading Arguments	Andrews, Larry. "Grades, Scores, and Honors: A Numbers Game?" <i>Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council</i> 8.1 (Spring/Summer 2007): 23–30.
Putting Good Reasons into Action	Weiner, Norm. "Honors is Elitist, and What's Wrong with That?" <i>Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council</i> 10.1 (Spring/Summer 2009): 19–24.
Definition Arguments	Szabos, Janice. "Bright child, gifted learner." <i>Challenge</i> 34 (1989): 4.
Causal Arguments	Welsh, Patrick. "The Advanced Placement Juggernaut: A Ridiculous Numbers Game." Room for Debate. <i>New York Times</i> , 20 Dec. 2009. Web. 10 Oct. 2012.

Narrative Arguments	Irwin, Bonnie E. "We Are the Stories We Tell." <i>Honors in Practice</i> 8 (2012): 17–19.
Rebuttal Arguments	Ashton, William A. "Honors Needs Diversity More than the Diverse Need Honors." <i>Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council</i> 10.1 (Spring/Summer 2009): 65–67.

III. **Article discussion:** Student pairs lead fifty-minute class discussions on brief, audience-accessible articles of their choice related to their research paper topics. The students leading the discussion gain experience in presenting discipline-specific topics to informed non-majors in an audience-appropriate fashion, and the class as a whole can practice debating a range of sometimes controversial topics, not simply those in their majors, in a collegial, academic manner.

IV. **Conference-style presentation:** Students prepare brief (ten minutes) conference-style presentations of their research papers. While many non-honors students can struggle with meeting a minimum time for an oral presentation, high-achieving honors students tend to exceed their maximum time. At our institution, however, students who are chosen to present their thesis material during the annual Senior Honors Showcase are limited to 5–10 minutes due to the length and logistics of the showcase schedule, so they have to make the transition from the hour-long thesis defense to a very brief presentation. This exercise introduces them to a strict time limitation and prepares them to be courteous co-panelists at state, regional, and national honors conferences.

Overall, this course structure has been successful for our institution's research-based honors program. Since the program's inception in 1999, approximately 43% of incoming honors first-year students have graduated from the program; for students who have taken this honors composition course, the graduation rate increases to approximately 57%. In 2006, in order to streamline

honors requirements and increase program retention, required honors hours were reduced from thirty to twenty-four, and select core courses, including honors first-year composition, were eliminated as requirements but would still count as honors electives. After this change, the program graduation rate starting with the 2006 incoming first-years did increase to approximately 48%; again, for students who took this course, the graduation rate increased concurrently to approximately 62%. Although multiple factors probably contributed to such correlations, we may assume that through immersion in discipline-specific university-level research and argumentation, honors students gain additional preparation for future undergraduate research opportunities, conference presentations, publications, and thesis and capstone projects, all of which contribute to active participation in and successful completion of a research-based honors program.

WORKS CITED

- Andrews, Larry. "Grades, Scores, and Honors: A Numbers Game?" *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 8, no.1, 2007, pp. 23–30.
- Ashton, William A. "Honors Needs Diversity More than the Diverse Need Honors." *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 10, no.1, 2009, pp. 65–67.
- Faigley, Lester, and Jack Selzer. *Good Reasons: Researching and Writing Effective Arguments*. 5th ed., Pearson/Longman, 2012.
- Irwin, Bonnie E. "We Are the Stories We Tell." *Honors in Practice*, vol. 8, 2012, pp. 17–19.
- Szabos, Janice. "Bright child, gifted learner." *Challenge*, vol. 34, 1989, p. 4.
- Weiner, Norm. "Honors is Elitist, and What's Wrong with That?" *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council*, vol. 10, no.1, 2009, pp. 19–24.

Welsh, Patrick. "The Advanced Placement Juggernaut: A Ridiculous Numbers Game." Room for Debate. *New York Times*, 20 Dec. 2009, roomfordebate.<https://blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/20/the-advanced-placement-juggernaut/?_r=0#patrick>. Accessed 23 Sep. 2016.

APPENDIX 1

Sample Syllabus for Fall Semester

Course Description

This course emphasizes the types of writing that students will do in college and reflects goals of the Honors Program with advanced work in critical thinking and research. Prerequisite: students must have been accepted in the University Honors Program.

Course Goals and Objectives

In this course, you will select a topic from your chosen or prospective major upon which to base your essays and final research paper. Throughout the semester, you will develop argumentation and research skills necessary for university-level academic writing within your discipline.

Course Materials**Required Texts:**

1. Faigley, Lester, and Jack Selzer. *Good Reasons: Researching and Writing Effective Arguments*. 5th ed. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2012.
2. *LB Brief with Resources for Composition*.

Course Topical Outline**Week 1**

Mon	Class Introduction
Wed	Chapter 16: Planning Research; Chapter 17: Finding Sources
Fri	Chapter 18: Evaluating and Recording Sources Chapter 20: Documenting Sources in MLA Style

Week 2

Mon	Assign Website Analysis
Wed	Chapter 19: Writing the Research Project
Fri	Article Discussion #1

Week 3

Mon	Labor Day—no classes
Wed	Chapter 1: Making an Effective Argument
Fri	Article Discussion #2

Week 4

Mon	Critique Website Analysis
Wed	Chapter 2: Reading Arguments “Grades, Scores, and Honors: A Numbers Game?”

Fri Chapter 3: Finding Arguments
Website Analysis due

Week 5

Mon Assign Book Analysis
 Wed Chapter 4: Drafting and Revising Arguments
 Fri Article Discussion #3

Week 6

Mon Chapter 5: Analyzing Written Arguments
 Wed Chapter 6: Analyzing Visual and Multimedia Arguments
 Fri Article Discussion #4

Week 7

Mon Critique Book Analysis
 Wed Chapter 7: Putting Good Reasons into Action
 “Honors is Elitist, and What’s Wrong with That?”
 Fri Chapter 8: Definition Arguments
 “Bright child, gifted learner.”
Book Analysis due

Week 8

Mon Fall Break—no classes
 Wed Assign Journal Analysis
 Fri Article Discussion #5

Week 9

Mon Chapter 9: Causal Arguments
 “The Advanced Placement Juggernaut: A Ridiculous Numbers Game”
 Wed Chapter 10: Evaluation Arguments
 Fri Article Discussion #6

Week 10

Mon Critique Journal Analysis
 Wed Chapter 11: Narrative Arguments
 “We Are the Stories We Tell”
 Fri Chapter 12: Rebuttal Arguments
 “Honors Needs Diversity More than the Diverse Need Honors”
Journal Analysis due

Week 11

Mon Assign Annotated Bibliography
 Wed Chapter 13: Proposal Arguments
 Fri Article Discussion #7

GUZY

Week 12

Mon	Chapter 14: Designing Multimedia Arguments Chapter 15: Presenting Arguments
Wed	Article Discussion #8
Fri	NCHC National Conference

Week 13

Mon	Critique Annotated Bibliography
Wed	Article Discussion #9
Fri	Annotated Bibliography due

Week 14

Mon	Conference Presentations
Wed	Conference Presentations
Fri	Conference Presentations

Week 15

Mon	Conference Presentations
Wed	Thanksgiving Break
Fri	Thanksgiving Break

Week 16

Mon	Conference Presentations
Wed	Critique Research Paper

Final Exam **Research Paper due**—Papers will not be accepted after the end of the exam period.

Assessment

Total Possible Points: Essays (4 x 100 pts = 400) + Research Paper (200) + Article Discussion (50) + Conference Presentation (50) = 700 points

Essay Format: Format all papers with 1" margins and 12-point Times New Roman font. On due dates, submit the peer critique draft and two clean paper copies of the final draft in a manila folder; your assignment will not be accepted unless you have all of these items.

Peer Critique Drafts: Providing a **typed** draft for peer critique days is required; failure to bring a draft results in a deduction of 10% of the possible points from the paper's final grade. Avoiding the deduction by merely not attending class is not an option. Electronic drafts submitted in lieu of attendance **will not** be accepted. Drafts must also be submitted to <<http://www.turnitin.com>> prior to the start of the class period during

which the final draft is due; instructions for <<http://www.turnitin.com>> access will be provided in class.

Late papers: I enforce the late paper policy stated in *Resources for Composition*: one grade (10%) lowered each **calendar** day an assignment is late. Your essays should be **typed, printed, and ready to submit** at the beginning of the class period in which they are due and will be considered late after the end of the class period. Printer access and functionality are your responsibility. Electronic drafts submitted in lieu of hard copies **will not** be accepted.

Article discussion: In your assigned pair, you will lead a 50-minute class discussion on a brief article of your choice related to your research paper topic(s). Select articles that have been published within the last three years. Provide paper copies of the article for each class member during the class period before your discussion day, and prepare a thorough, one-page outline of notes for your discussion (including the complete MLA bibliographic citation at the top) to be submitted at the end of the period.

Conference-Style Presentations: At the end of the semester, you will give a ten-minute presentation on your research paper topic. Edit your presentation material judiciously, retaining the essential organization and development of the key points to be used in your final paper. You will also provide audio/visual aids and handouts, the design of which will be considered in your overall presentation grade.

APPENDIX 2

Sample Assignment Sheets

WEBSITE ANALYSIS

100 points

Fall 20XX

Content

Using the “Evaluating Web Information” guidelines provided on the USA Library website, evaluate a website you might use as a source of information for your research paper. When answering the questions, do not use a magazine-style Q&A format in which you simply state the question and answer briefly. Instead, incorporate the questions and your responses into fully developed paragraphs, remembering to include transitional material when moving from section to section rather than jumping from one topic to the next with no connection.

Format

1. The paper will be 3–5 pages long. This means three *full* pages minimum and five maximum. If your paper is running either short or long, edit your text to fit the page requirement rather than changing font size, margin size, etc.
2. Format information at the top of the first page as follows, single-spacing identification information and double-spacing around the centered title:

Your Name

Website Analysis

EH 105-101

Date

Evaluating *National Collegiate Honors Council*

<<http://www.nchchonors.org>>

3. Insert page numbers in the upper right-hand corner of each page (use your “Insert” function rather than spacing these by hand), but do not use any other running heads.
4. Double space the body of your paper.

Evaluation

In addition to the Shared Criteria identified in *Resources*, I will look for the following:

1. Is the website related to your prospective research paper topic?
2. Did you answer the questions from the “Evaluating Web Information” webpage?

3. Did you put your responses into essay form, with an introduction, body, and conclusion?
4. Did you make transitions from point to point?
5. Is your essay at least three full pages minimum?

Due Dates

- Critique draft (minimum two full pages) due Monday, September XX
 - Turnitin draft submitted by XX:XX on Friday, September XX
 - Final draft due Friday, September XX
-

BOOK ANALYSIS

100 points

Fall 20XX

Content

Using criteria discussed in pages 64–65 of *Good Reasons*, write a rhetorical analysis of a book you might use in your final paper. You might consult with a professor in your discipline in choosing an appropriate or important book for your research project.

Pay specific attention to the questions in Steps 2 and 3:

Step 2: Analyze the **context**
 Who is the **author**?
 Who is the **audience**?
 What is the **larger conversation**?

Step 3: Analyze the **text**
 Summarize the **argument**
 What is the **medium** and **genre**?
 What **appeals** are used?
 How would you characterize the **style**?

- Remember, one main focus of this class is argumentation, so consider carefully the arguments presented in your book. Do not write a book report that simply summarizes the text.
- When choosing a book to analyze, avoid anthologies, which are collections of essays written by a number of different authors, because they do not present one lengthy, coherent argument constructed by the same author or authors.

Format

Format requirements from the Website Analysis apply here: 3–5 pages, double-spaced text, 1" margins, 12-point Times New Roman Font.

Title:

Analysis of Book Title Italicized
by Author's Name

Evaluation

In addition to the Shared Criteria, I will look for the following:

1. Have you addressed the questions from Steps 2, 3, and 4 in your analysis?
2. Do you incorporate specific examples to support your own points?

Due Dates

- Critique draft (minimum two full pages) due Monday, September XX
 - Turnitin draft submitted by XX:XX on Friday, October XX
 - Final draft due Friday, October XX
-

JOURNAL ANALYSIS

100 points

Fall 20XX

Content

Using the criteria below and additional points we may discuss in class, write a critical analysis of the content and format of the most recent issue of a professional journal in your major field. Consider the *entire issue*, not just one article. You will need to use one of the university libraries or your department library because public libraries and newsstands typically do not carry the type of field-specific journals you will need to conduct university-level research.

1. **Issue content:** Analyze the writing styles and methods you find in your journal, and include summaries and quotations from various articles to support your points. Discuss article topics, field-specific jargon, tone, and other content-related features.
2. **Issue format:** Analyze the visual rhetoric aspects of the journal. Discuss journal sections, graphic devices within articles, advertisements, announcements, and so forth.

Online Articles, Online Journals

Many journal *articles* are available electronically through library search engines, but remember that you are reviewing **a journal issue in its entirety**. When reviewing an electronic journal or an electronic version of a print journal, remember that you must analyze content, which is similar to print journals, and format, which may not be. If the journal is available in web format rather than as a .pdf, use appropriate criteria for evaluating website format. If you cannot locate your journal online, or if you cannot access important but subscriber-only areas of the journal's website, then choose another journal or review a print version if available. Your honors advisor, another department professor, or a research librarian can provide valuable assistance here.

Format

Format requirements from the Website Analysis apply here (3–5 pages, double-spaced text, 1" margins, 12-point Times New Roman font).

Title:

Analysis of *Journal Title Italicized*
Volume, Issue, and Date Information

Attachments: At the back of your paper, attach photocopies or printouts of at least **two** representative pages of your journal, to which you will refer as examples within your analysis.

Evaluation

In addition to the Shared Criteria, I will look for the following:

1. Did you discuss the entire issue, not just one article?
2. Did you address both the content and the format of the issue?
3. Did you include examples within your text and refer to your attachments?

Due Dates

- Critique draft (minimum two full pages) due Monday, October XX
 - Turnitin draft submitted by XX:XX on Friday, October XX
 - Final draft due Friday, October XX
-

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

100 points

Fall 20XX

Content

Compile an annotated bibliography of a *minimum* of 20 sources that are potential source material for your research paper. The purpose of this assignment is to collect a pool of resources from which you can draw to write your research paper. You do not have to include all twenty in your research paper, nor are you limited to using only these sources.

Each bibliographic entry will be accompanied by an annotation, which is a brief descriptive and evaluative summary of each source—perhaps one to three sentences.

I will not require a certain number for each type of source (5 books, 5 journal articles, etc.); however, I want you to limit the number of websites you include to 5 *maximum*. This limitation focuses strictly on websites and does not include electronically published information from the library that you can find using a library database. For example, the National Collegiate Honors Council has a website <<http://www.nchchonors.org>> that I would list as a website; if I find a full text article from one of NCHC's publications, *Journal of the National Collegiate Council*, using a library database, I would list that as an article from that specific journal which I accessed on that database.

While collecting your source information, you do not have to read each source in its entirety, although the more you know about each source, the better you will be able to discern which sources will be the most useful for your research paper. Look for abstracts and full-text availability.

Format

- The first line of each entry should be flush with the left margin; all additional entry lines and the annotation lines should be indented.
- Alphabetize and compose your entries using MLA conventions.
- Within the annotations, write your comments in complete sentences.

Cover Memo

Attach a cover memo to the front of your bibliography that states your final topic choice. Memo format includes the following lines in the upper left-hand corner of the page:

Date: November XX, 20XX

To: Dr. Annmarie Guzy

From: Your Name [Note: by hand, sign your initials at the end of this line]

Subject: Research Topic and Annotated Bibliography

In the body of your memo, discuss your intended research paper focus. You cannot change your topic after this date.

Evaluation

In addition to the Shared Criteria, I will look for the following:

1. Do you have a minimum of 20 sources?
2. Do you follow MLA citation conventions?
3. Do your annotations contain complete sentences?

Due Dates

- Critique draft (minimum 20 sources with annotations) due Monday, November XX
 - Turnitin draft submitted by XX:XX on Friday, November XX
 - Final draft due Friday, November XX
-

RESEARCH PAPER

200 points

Fall 20XX

Content

Using the source material you have collected throughout the semester, write a paper that identifies and weighs arguments concerning the discipline-related issue you have chosen to research. Do not simply present information, such as “A History of . . .” something, but select a **debatable issue** in your field and discuss what various experts in the field think about that topic.

Cite at least five different sources within your paper to provide examples of arguments about your issue. Include quotations to support your examples, but follow the common recommendation that quotations occupy no more than 10 to 15 percent of your paper.

Use correct MLA documentation format when citing and quoting sources within your paper and when listing them on your Works Cited page. **Do not** use APA format—review the textbook to distinguish the two different styles.

Format

Formal outline: At the front of your paper, include an outline that adheres to standard Roman numeral style (spacing, indentation, parallelism of entries, etc.).

Length: The *body* of your paper should be a minimum of 8 full pages and a maximum of 10 full pages. Additional material, such as your outline, works cited page, and any appendices you may wish to include, is not included in this page minimum.

Paper format: As with all course assignments, use 1" margins, double-spaced text, and 12-point Times New Roman font. No special binding is required beyond a staple in the upper left-hand corner.

Evaluation

In addition to the Shared Criteria, I will look for the following:

1. Is the body of your paper at least 8 full pages long?
2. Do you identify *arguments* concerning your major-related issue?
3. Do you use proper MLA style within the paper and on the works cited page?
4. Do you cite at least 5 sources within the paper?
5. Have you plagiarized?

Due Dates

- Critique draft (minimum six full pages) due Wednesday, December XX
- Turnitin draft submitted by XX:XX on Wednesday, December XX
- Final draft due Wednesday, December XX

Papers will not be accepted after the end of the final exam period.